



HELIODORA

AND OTHER POEMS BY

H. D.

"THERE is certainly nothing in contemporary literature that surpasses these later poems," wrote May Sinclair of "H. D.'s" last volume, "at first sight so splendidly dim, at last so radiant, so crystalline. An austere ecstasy is in them. They have the quick beat of birds' wings, the rise and fall of big waves, the slow, magical movement of figures in some festival of Demeter, or Dionysus, carrying the sacra. With each year she has achieved a wider range, a greater depth and intensity of vision. Whether she is judged by that quality or by the sheer beauty of her form, there can be no doubt that her place in literature is secure."

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

FIR-FLOWER TABLETS

Poems translated from the Chinese
by Florence Ayscough

ENGLISH VERSIONS

By Amy Lowell

“FIR-FLOWER TABLETS” is a collection of translations from Chinese poets, mostly of the T’ang period. Mrs. Ayscough, a life-long resident of China, honorary member and librarian of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and Miss Lowell, the well-known poet, have collaborated in producing a remarkable volume. This is the first time that an English version of Chinese poems has been at once the work of a sinologue and a poet. Not only is the flavor of the originals preserved, the very words and phrases are reproduced — an accomplishment that has hitherto seemed out of the question where the translation of Chinese is concerned. If this were a volume of English poems, it would be an achievement; when we consider that the poems are translations, the result becomes little short of amazing. Many of the poems are translated for the first time, and an introduction by Mrs. Ayscough, with an appendix explaining the allusions, adds to the value of an extraordinary book.



Sent to R. R. L. 9/18/29

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And Other Poems

Heliodora

And Other Poems

by H. D.

Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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BUTLER AND TANNER LTD., FROME AND LONDON

Acknowledgment for the permission to reprint certain poems is due to: *Nation*, *Sphere*, *Egoist* (London); *Bookman*, *Poetry*, *Double Dealer* (New York, Chicago, New Orleans); *Transatlantic*, *Gargoyle* (Paris); *The Imagist Anthologies* and the *Miscellany of American Poetry* (1922).

Note

The poem *Lais* has in italics a translation of the Plato epigram in the Greek Anthology. *Heliodora* has in italics the two Meleager epigrams from the Anthology. In *Nossis* is the translation of the opening lines of the *Garland of Meleager* and the poem of *Nossis* herself in the Greek Anthology. The four *Sappho* fragments are re-worked freely. The *Odyssey* is a translation of the opening of the first book. The *Ion* is a translation of the latter part of the first long chorus of the *Ion* of Euripides.

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WASH of cold river
in a glacial land,
Ionian water,
chill, snow-ribbed sand,
drift of rare flowers,
clear, with delicate shell-
like leaf enclosing
frozen lily-leaf,
camellia texture,
colder than a rose;

wind-flower
that keeps the breath
of the north-wind—
these and none other;

intimate thoughts and kind
reach out to share
the treasure of my mind,
intimate hands and dear
draw garden-ward and sea-ward
all the sheer rapture
that I would take
to mould a clear
and frigid statue;

rare, of pure texture,
beautiful space and line,
marble to grace
your inaccessible shrine.

Holy Satyr

MOST holy Satyr,
like a goat,
with horns and hooves
to match thy coat
of russet brown,
I make leaf-circlets
and a crown of honey-flowers
for thy throat;
where the amber petals
drip to ivory,
I cut and slip
each stiffened petal
in the rift
of carven petal;
honey horn
has wed the bright
virgin petal of the white
flower cluster: lip to lip
let them whisper,
let them lilt, quivering.

Most holy Satyr,
like a goat,

hear this our song,
accept our leaves,
love-offering,
return our hymn,
like echo fling
a sweet song,
answering note for note.

Lais

LET her who walks in Paphos
take the glass,
let Paphos take the mirror
and the work of frosted fruit,
gold apples set
with silver apple-leaf,
white leaf of silver
wrought with vein of gilt.

Let Paphos lift the mirror,
let her look
into the polished centre of the disk.

Let Paphos take the mirror;
did she press
flowerlet of flame-flower
to the lustrous white
of the white forehead?
did the dark veins beat
a deeper purple
than the wine-deep tint
of the dark flower?

Did she deck black hair
one evening, with the winter-white
flower of the winter-berry,
did she look (reft of her lover)
at a face gone white
under the chaplet
of white virgin-breath?

Lais, exultant, tyrannizing Greece,
Lais who kept her lovers in the porch,
lover on lover waiting,
(but to creep
where the robe brushed the threshold
where still sleeps Lais,)
so she creeps, Lais,
to lay her mirror at the feet
of her who reigns in Paphos.

Lais has left her mirror
for she sees no longer in its depth
the Lais' self
that laughed exultant
tyrannizing Greece.

Lais has left her mirror,
for she weeps no longer,

finding in its depth,
a face, but other
than dark flame and white
feature of perfect marble.

*Lais has left her mirror,
(so one wrote)
to her who reigns in Paphos;
Lais who laughed a tyrant over Greece,
Lais who turned the lovers from the porch,
that swarm for whom now
Lais has no use;
Lais is now no lover of the glass,
seeing no more the face as once it was,
wishing to see that face and finding this.*

Heliodora

HE and I sought together,
H over the spattered table,
rhymes and flowers,
gifts for a name.

He said, among others,
I will bring
(and the phrase was just and good,
but not as good as mine,)
“the narcissus that loves the rain.”

We strove for a name,
while the light of the lamps burnt thin
and the outer dawn came in,
a ghost, the last at the feast
or the first,
to sit within
with the two that remained
to quibble in flowers and verse
over a girl's name.

He said, “the rain loving,”
I said, “the narcissus, drunk,
drunk with the rain.”

Yet I had lost
for he said,
“the rose, the lover’s gift,
is loved of love,”
he said it,
“loved of love;”
I waited, even as he spoke,
to see the room filled with a light,
as when in winter
the embers catch in a wind
when a room is dank;
so it would be filled, I thought,
our room with a light
when he said
(and he said it first,)
“the rose, the lover’s delight,
is loved of love,”
but the light was the same.

Then he caught,
seeing the fire in my eyes,
my fire, my fever, perhaps,
for he leaned
with the purple wine
stained on his sleeve,

and said this:
“did you ever think
a girl’s mouth
caught in a kiss,
is a lily that laughs?”

I had not.
I saw it now
as men must see it forever afterwards;
no poet could write again,
“the red-lily,
a girl’s laugh caught in a kiss;”
it was his to pour in the vat
from which all poets dip and quaff,
for poets are brothers in this.

So I saw the fire in his eyes,
it was almost my fire,
(he was younger,)
I saw the face so white,
my heart beat,
it was almost my phrase;
I said, “surprise the muses,
take them by surprise;

it is late,
rather it is dawn-rise,
those ladies sleep, the nine,
our own king's mistresses."

A name to rhyme,
flowers to bring to a name,
what was one girl faint and shy,
with eyes like the myrtle,
(I said: "her underlids
are rather like myrtle,")
to vie with the nine?

Let him take the name,
he had the rhymes,
"the rose, loved of love,
the lily, a mouth that laughs,"
he had the gift,
"the scented crocus,
the purple hyacinth,"
what was one girl to the nine?

He said:
"I will make her a wreath;"
he said:
"I will write it thus:

*I will bring you the lily that laughs,
I will twine
with soft narcissus, the myrtle,
sweet crocus, white violet,
the purple hyacinth, and last,
the rose, loved-of-love,
that these may drip on your hair
the less soft flowers,
may mingle sweet with the sweet
of Heliodora's locks,
myrrh-curled."*

(He wrote myrrh-curled,
I think, the first.)

I said:

*"they sleep, the nine,"
when he shouted swift and passionate:
"that for the nine!
above the hills
the sun is about to wake,
and to-day white violets
shine beside white lilies
adrift on the mountain side;
to-day the narcissus opens
that loves the rain."*

I watched him to the door,
catching his robe
as the wine-bowl crashed to the floor,
spilling a few wet lees,
(ah, his purple hyacinth!)
I saw him out of the door,
I thought:
there will never be a poet
in all the centuries after this,
who will dare write,
after my friend's verse,
"a girl's mouth
is a lily kissed."

Helen

ALL Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands.

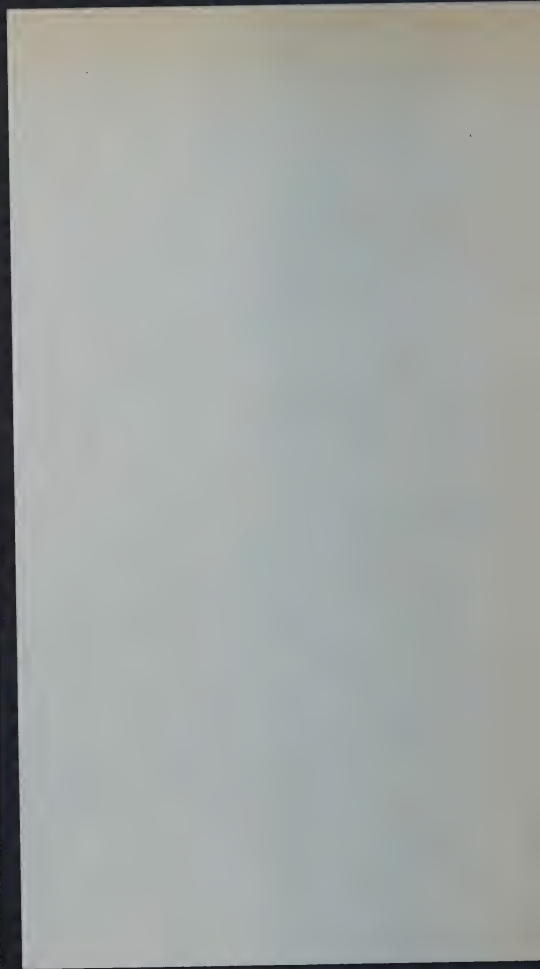
All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still
when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

MISS KELLER - MAILING DEPT.

thanks a lot

Frances Newell



Nossis

I THOUGHT to hear him speak
the girl might rise
and make the garden silver,
as the white moon breaks,
“Nossis,” he cried, “a flame.”

I said:

“a girl that’s dead
some hundred years;
a poet—what of that?
for in the islands,
in the haunts of Greek Ionia,
Rhodes and Cyprus,
girls are cheap.”

I said, to test his mood,
to make him rage or laugh or sing or weep,
“in Greek Ionia and in Cyprus,
many girls are found
with wreaths and apple-branches.”

“Only a hundred years or two or three,
has she lain dead

yet men forget;"
he said,
"I want a garden,"
and I thought
he wished to make a terrace on the hill,
bend the stream to it,
set out daffodils,
plant Phrygian violets,
such was his will and whim,
I thought,
to name and watch each flower.

His was no garden
bright with Tyrian violets,
his was a shelter
wrought of flame and spirit,
and as he flung her name
against the dark,
I thought the iris-flowers
that lined the path
must be the ghost of Nossis.

*"Who made the wreath,
for what man was it wrought?"*

*speak, fashioned all of fruit-buds,
song, my loveliest,
say Meleager brought to Diocles,
(a gift for that enchanting friend)
memories with names of poets.*

*He sought for Moero, lilies,
and those many,
red-lilies for Anyte,
for Sappho, roses,
with those few, he caught
that breath of the sweet-scented
leaf of iris,
the myrrh-iris,
to set beside the tablet
and the wax
which Love had burnt,
when scarred across by Nossis:"*

when she wrote:

*"I Nossis stand by this:
I state that love is sweet:
if you think otherwise
assert what beauty
or what charm*

*after the charm of love,
retains its grace?*

*"Honey," you say:
honey? I say "I spit
honey out of my mouth:
nothing is second-best
after the sweet of Eros."*

*I Nossis stand and state
that he whom Love neglects
has naught, no flower, no grace,
who lacks that rose, her kiss."*

I thought to hear him speak
the girl might rise
and make the garden silver
as the white moon breaks,
"Nossis," he cried, "a flame."

Centaur Song

NOW that the day is done,
now that the night creeps soft
and dims the chestnut clusters'
radiant spike of flower,
O sweet, till dawn
break through the branches
of our orchard-garden,
rest in this shelter
of the osier-wood and thorn.

They fall,
the apple-flowers;
nor softer grace has Aphrodite
in the heaven afar,
nor at so fair a pace
open the flower-petals
as your face bends down,
while, breath on breath,
your mouth wanders
from my mouth o'er my face.

What have I left
to bring you in this place,

already sweet with violets?
(those you brought
with swathes of earliest grass,
forest and meadow balm,
flung from your giant arms
for us to rest upon.)

Fair are these petals
broken by your feet;
your horse's hooves
tread softer than a deer's;
your eyes, startled,
are like the deer eyes
while your heart
trembles more than the deer.

O earth, O god,
O forest, stream or river,
what shall I bring
that all the day hold back,
that Dawn remember Love
and rest upon her bed,
and Zeus, forgetful not of Danæ or Maia,

bid the stars shine forever.

Oread

WHIRL up, sea –
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

The Pool

ARE you alive?
I touch you.
You quiver like a sea-fish.
I cover you with my net.
What are you—banded one?

Thetis

HE had asked for immortal life
in the old days and had grown old,
now he had aged apace,
he asked for his youth,
and I, Thetis, ganted him

freedom under the sea
drip and welter of weeds,
the drift of the fringing grass,
the gift of the never-withering moss,
and the flowering reed,

and most,
beauty of fifty nereids,
sisters of nine,
I one of their least,
yet great and a goddess,
granted Pelius,

love under the sea,
beauty, grace infinite:

So I crept, at last,
a crescent, a curve of a wave,

(a man would have thought,
had he watched for his nets
on the beach)
a dolphin, a glistening fish,
that burnt and caught for its light,
the light of the undercrest
of the lifting tide,
a fish with silver for breast,
with no light but the light
of the sea it reflects.

Little he would have guessed,
(had such a one
watched by his nets,)
that a goddess flung from the crest
of the wave the blue of its own
bright tress of hair,
the blue of the painted stuff
it wore for dress.

No man would have known save he,
whose coming I sensed as I strung
my pearl and agate and pearl,
to mark the beat and the stress
of the lilt of my song.

*Who dreams of a son,
save one,
childless, having no bright
face to flatter its own,
who dreams of a son?*

*Nereids under the sea,
my sisters, fifty and one,
(counting myself)
they dream of a child
of water and sea,
with hair of the softest,
to lie along the curve
of fragile, tiny bones,
yet more beautiful each than each,
hair more bright and long,
to rival its own.*

*Nereids under the wave,
who dreams of a son
save I, Thetis, alone?*

*Each would have for a child,
a stray self, furtive and wild,
to dive and leap to the wind,
to wheedle and coax*

*the stray birds bright and bland
of foreign strands,
to crawl and stretch on the sands,
each would have for its own,
a daughter for child.*

*Who dreams, who sings of a son?
I, Thetis, alone.*

When I had finished my song,
and dropped the last seed-pearl,
and flung the necklet
about my throat
and found it none too bright,
not bright enough nor pale
enough, not like the moon that creeps
beneath the sea,
between the lift of crest and crest,
had tried it on
and found it not
quite fair enough
to fill the night
of my blue folds of bluest dress
with moon for light,
I cast the beads aside and leapt,

myself all blue
with no bright gloss
of pearls for crescent light;

but one alert, all blue and wet,
I flung myself, an arrow's flight,
straight upward
through the blue of night
that was my palace wall,
and crept to where I saw the mark
of feet, a rare foot-fall:

Achilles' sandal on the beach,
could one mistake?
perhaps a lover or a nymph,
lost from the tangled fern and brake,
that lines the upper shelf of land,
perhaps a goddess or a nymph
might so mistake
Achilles' footprint for the trace
of a bright god alert to track
the panther where he slinks for thirst
across the sand;

perhaps a goddess or a nymph,
might think a god had crossed the track

of weed and drift,
had broken here this stem of reed,
had turned this sea-shell to the light:

So she must stoop, this goddess girl,
or nymph, with crest of blossoming wood
about her hair for cap or crown,
must stoop and kneel and bending down,
must kiss the print of such a one.

Not I, the mother, Thetis self,
I stretched and lay, a river's slim
dark length,
a rivulet where it leaves the wood,
and meets the sea,
I lay along the burning sand,
a river's blue.

At Ithaca

OVER and back,
the long waves crawl
and track the sand with foam;
night darkens and the sea
takes on that desperate tone
of dark that wives put on
when all their love is done.

Over and back,
the tangled thread falls slack,
over and up and on;
over and all is sewn;
now while I bind the end,
I wish some fiery friend
would sweep impetuously
these fingers from the loom.

My weary thoughts
play traitor to my soul,
just as the toil is over;
swift while the woof is whole,
turn now my spirit, swift,
and tear the pattern there,
the flowers so deftly wrought,

the border of sea-blue,
the sea-blue coast of home.

The web was over-fair,
that web of pictures there,
enchantments that I thought
he had, that I had lost;
weaving his happiness
within the stitching frame,
weaving his fire and fame,
I thought my work was done,
I prayed that only one
of those that I had spurned,
might stoop and conquer this
long waiting with a kiss.

But each time that I see
my work so beautifully
inwoven and would keep
the picture and the whole,
Athene steels my soul,
slanting across my brain,
I see as shafts of rain
his chariot and his shafts,

I see the arrows fall,
I see my lord who moves
like Hector, lord of love,
I see him matched with fair
bright rivals and I see
those lesser rivals flee.

We Two

WE two are left:
I with small grace reveal
distaste and bitterness;
you with small patience
take my hands;
though effortless,
you scald their weight
as a bowl, lined with embers,
wherein droop
great petals of white rose,
forced by the heat
too soon to break.

We two are left:
as a blank wall, the world,
earth and the men who talk,
saying their space of life
is good and gracious,
with eyes blank
as that blank surface
their ignorance mistakes
for final shelter
and a resting-place.

We two remain:
yet by what miracle,
searching within the tangles of my brain,
I ask again,
have we two met within
this maze of dædal paths
in-wound mid grievous stone,
where once I stood alone?

Fragment Thirty-six

*I know not what to do:
my mind is divided.*

SAPPHO

I KNOW not what to do,
my mind is reft:
is song's gift best?
is love's gift loveliest?
I know not what to do,
now sleep has pressed
weight on your eyelids.

Shall I break your rest,
devouring, eager?
is love's gift best?
nay, song's the loveliest:
yet were you lost,
what rapture
could I take from song?
what song were left?

I know not what to do:
to turn and slake
the rage that burns,
with my breath burn

and trouble your cool breath?
so shall I turn and take
snow in my arms?
(is love's gift best?)
yet flake on flake
of snow were comfortless,
did you lie wondering,
wakened yet unawake.

Shall I turn and take
comfortless snow within my arms?
press lips to lips
that answer not,
press lips to flesh
that shudders not nor breaks?

Is love's gift best?
shall I turn and slake
all the wild longing?
O I am eager for you!
as the Pleiads shake
white light in whiter water
so shall I take you?

My mind is quite divided,
my minds hesitate,

so perfect matched,
I know not what to do:
each strives with each
as two white wrestlers
standing for a match,
ready to turn and clutch
yet never shake muscle nor nerve nor tendon;
so my mind waits
to grapple with my mind,
yet I lie quiet,
I would seem at rest.

I know not what to do:
strain upon strain,
sound surging upon sound
makes my brain blind;
as a wave-line may wait to fall
yet (waiting for its falling)
still the wind may take
from off its crest,
white flake on flake of foam,
that rises,
seeming to dart and pulse
and rend the light,
so my mind hesitates

above the passion
quivering yet to break,
so my mind hesitates
above my mind,
listening to song's delight.

I know not what to do:
will the sound break,
rending the night
with rift on rift of rose
and scattered light?
will the sound break at last
as the wave hesitant,
or will the whole night pass
and I lie listening awake?

Flute Song

LITTLE scavenger away,
touch not the door,
beat not the portal down,
cross not the sill,
silent until
my song, bright and shrill,
breathes out its lay.

Little scavenger avaunt,
tempt me with jeer and taunt,
yet you will wait to-day;
for it were surely ill
to mock and shout and revel;
it were more fit to tell
with flutes and calathes,
your mother's praise.

After Troy

WE flung against their gods,
invincible, clear hate;
we fought;
frantic, we flung the last
imperious, desperate shaft

and lost:

we knew the loss
before they ever guessed
fortune had tossed to them
her favour and her whim;
but how were we depressed?
we lost yet as we pressed
our spearsmen on their best,
we knew their line invincible
because there fell
on them no shiverings
of the white enchanteress,
radiant Aphrodite's spell:

we hurled our shafts of passion,
noblest hate,
and knew their cause was blest,
and knew their gods were nobler,

better taught in skill,
subtler with wit of thought,
yet had it been God's will
that *they* not we should fall,
we know those fields had bled
with roses lesser red.

Cassandra

O Hymen king.

HYMEN, O Hymen king,
what bitter thing is this?
what shaft, tearing my heart?
what scar, what light, what fire
searing my eye-balls and my eyes with flame?
nameless, O spoken name,
king, lord, speak blameless Hymen.

Why do you blind my eyes?
why do you dart and pulse
till all the dark is home,
then find my soul
and ruthless draw it back?
scaling the scaleless,
opening the dark?
speak, nameless, power and might;
when will you leave me quite?
when will you break my wings
or leave them utterly free
to scale heaven endlessly?

A bitter, broken thing,
my heart, O Hymen lord,

yet neither drought nor sword
baffles men quite,
why must they feign to fear
my virgin glance?
feigned utterly or real
why do they shrink?
my trance frightens them,
breaks the dance,
empties the market place;
if I but pass they fall
back, frantically;
must always people mock?
unless they shrink and reel
as in the temple
at your uttered will.

O Hymen king,
lord, greatest, power, might,
look for my face is dark,
burnt with your light,
your fire, O Hymen lord;
is there none left
can equal me
in ecstasy, desire?
is there none left

can bear with me
the kiss of your white fire?
is there not one,
Phrygian or frenzied Greek,
poet, song-swept, or bard,
one meet to take from me
this bitter power of song,
one fit to speak, Hymen,
your praises, lord?

May I not wed
as you have wed?
may it not break, beauty,
from out my hands, my head, my feet?
may Love not lie beside me
till his heat
burn me to ash?
may he not comfort me, then,
spent of all that fire and heat,
still, ashen-white and cool
as the wet laurels,
white, before your feet
step on the mountain-slope,
before your fiery hand
lift up the mantle

covering flower and land,
as a man lifts,
O Hymen, from his bride,
(cowering with woman eyes,) the veil?
O Hymen lord, be kind.

Epigrams

I

ORUTHLESS, perilous, imperious hate,
you can not thwart
the promptings of my soul,
you can not weaken nay nor dominate
Love that is mateless,
Love the rite,
the whole measure of being:
would you crush with bondage?
nay, you would love me not
were I your slave.

2

Torture me not with this or that or this,
Love is my master,
you his lesser self;
while you are Love,
I love you generously,
be Eros,
not a tyrannous, bitter mate:
Love has no charm
when Love is swept to earth:

you'd make a lop-winged god,
frozen and contrite,
of god up-darting,
winged for passionate flight.

Fragment Forty

Love . . . bitter-sweet.

SAPPHO

I

KEEP love and he wings
with his bow,
up, mocking us,
keep love and he taunts us
and escapes.

Keep love and he sways apart
in another world,
outdistancing us.

Keep love and he mocks,
ah, bitter and sweet,
your sweetness is more cruel
than your hurt.

Honey and salt,
fire burst from the rocks
to meet fire
spilt from Hesperus.

Fire darted aloft and met fire :
in that moment
love entered us.

2

Could Eros be kept?
he were prisoned long since
and sick with imprisonment;
could Eros be kept?
others would have broken
and crushed out his life.

Could Eros be kept?
we too sinning, by Kypris,
might have prisoned him outright.

Could Eros be kept?
nay, thank him and the bright goddess
that he left us.

3

Ah, love is bitter and sweet,
but which is more sweet,
the sweetness
or the bitterness?
none has spoken it.

Love is bitter,
but can salt taint sea-flowers,
grief, happiness?

Is it bitter to give back
love to your lover
if he crave it?

Is it bitter to give back
love to your lover
if he wish it
for a new favourite?
who can say,
or is it sweet?

Is it sweet
to possess utterly?
or is it bitter,
bitter as ash?

4

I had thought myself frail;
a petal,
with light equal
on leaf and under-leaf.

I had thought myself frail;
a lamp,
shell, ivory or crust of pearl,
about to fall shattered,
with flame spent.

I cried:
"I must perish,
I am deserted,
an outcast, desperate
in this darkness,"
(such fire rent me with Hesperus,)
then the day broke.

5

What need of a lamp
when day lightens us,
what need to bind love
when love stands
with such radiant wings
over us?

What need —
yet to sing love,
love must first shatter us,

Toward the Piræus

S*LAY* with your eyes, Greek,
men over the face of the earth,
slay with your eyes, the host,
puny, passionless, weak.

*Break as the ranks of steel
broke when the Persian lost:
craven, we hated them then:
now we would count them Gods
beside these, spawn of the earth.*

*Grant us your mantle, Greek;
grant us but one
to fright (as your eyes) with a sword,
men, craven and weak,
grant us but one to strike
one blow for you, passionate Greek.*

I

You would have broken my wings,
but the very fact that you knew
I had wings, set some seal
on my bitter heart, my heart
broke and fluttered and sang.

You would have snared me,
and scattered the strands of my nest;
but the very fact that you saw,
sheltered me, claimed me,
set me apart from the rest

Of men – of *men*, made you a god,
and me, claimed me, set me apart
and the song in my breast,
yours, yours forever –
if I escape your evil heart.

2

I loved you:
men have writ and women have said
they loved,
but as the Pythoness stands by the altar,
intense and may not move,

till the fumes pass over;
and may not falter or break,
till the priest has caught the words
that mar or make
a deme or a ravaged town;

so I, though my knees tremble,
my heart break,
must note the rumbling,
heed only the shuddering
down in the fissure beneath the rock
of the temple floor;

must wait and watch
and may not turn nor move,
nor break from my trance to speak
so slight, so sweet,
so simple a word as love.

3

What had you done
had you been true,
I can not think,
I may not know.

What could we do
were I not wise,
what play invent,
what joy devise?

What could we do
if you were great?

(Yet were you lost,
who were there then,
to circumvent
the tricks of men?)

What can we do,
for curious lies
have filled your heart,
and in my eyes
sorrow has writ
that I am wise.

4

If I had been a boy,
I would have worshipped your grace,
I would have flung my worship
before your feet,
I would have followed apart,
glad, rent with an ecstasy
to watch you turn
your great head, set on the throat,
thick, dark with its sinews,

burned and wrought
like the olive stalk,
and the noble chin
and the throat.

I would have stood,
and watched and watched
and burned,
and when in the night,
from the many hosts, your slaves,
and warriors and serving men
you had turned
to the purple couch and the flame
of the woman, tall like the cypress tree
that flames sudden and swift and free
as with crackle of golden resin
and cones and the locks flung free
like the cypress limbs,
bound, caught and shaken and loosed,
bound, caught and riven and bound
and loosened again,
as in rain of a kingly storm
or wind full from a desert plain.

So, when you had risen
from all the lethargy of love and its heat,

you would have summoned me,
me alone,
and found my hands,
beyond all the hands in the world,
cold, cold, cold,
intolerably cold and sweet.

5

It was not chastity that made me cold nor
fear,
only I knew that you, like myself, were sick
of the puny race that crawls and quibbles
and lisps
of love and love and lovers and love's deceit.

It was not chastity that made me wild, but
fear
that my weapon, tempered in different heat,
was over-matched by yours, and your hand
skilled to yield death-blows, might break

With the slightest turn – no ill will meant –
my own lesser, yet still somewhat fine-
wrought,
fiery-tempered, delicate, over-passionate
steel.

Moonrise

WILL you glimmer on the sea?
will you fling your spear-head
on the shore?
what note shall we pitch?
we have a song,
on the bank we share our arrows;
the loosed string tells our note:

O flight,
bring her swiftly to our song.
she is great,
we measure her by the pine trees.

At Eleusis

WHAT they did,
they did for Dionysos,
for ecstasy's sake:

now take the basket,
think;
think of the moment you count
most foul in your life;
conjure it,
supplicate,
pray to it;
your face is bleak, you retract,
you dare not remember it:

stop;
it is too late.
the next stands by the altar step,
a child's face yet not innocent,
it will prove adequate, but you,
I could have spelt your peril at the gate,
yet for your mind's sake,
though you could not enter,
wait.

*What they did,
they did for Dionysos,
for ecstasy's sake:*

Now take the basket —
(ah face in a dream,
did I not know your heart,
I would falter,
for each that fares onward
is my child;
ah can you wonder
that my hands shake,
that my knees tremble,
I a mortal, set in the goddess' place?)

Fragment Forty-one

. . . thou flittest to Andromeda.

SAPPHO

I

AM I blind alas,
am I blind?

I too have followed
her path.

I too have bent at her feet.

I too have wakened to pluck
amaranth in the straight shaft,
amaranth purple in the cup,
scorched at the edge to white.

Am I blind?

am I the less ready for her sacrifice?

am I the less eager to give
what she asks,

she the shameless and radiant?

Am I quite lost,

I towering above you and her glance,
walking with swifter pace,

with clearer sight,
with intensity
beside which you two
are as spent ash?

Nay, I give back to the goddess the gift
she tendered me in a moment
of great bounty.

I return it. I lay it again
on the white slab of her house,
the beauty she cast out
one moment, careless.

Nor do I cry out:
“why did I stoop?
why did I turn aside
one moment from the rocks
marking the sea-path?
Aphrodite, shameless and radiant,
have pity, turn, answer us.”

Ah no – though I stumble toward
her altar-step,
though my flesh is scorched and rent,
shattered, cut apart,
slashed open;

though my heels press my own wet life
black, dark to purple,
on the smooth, rose-streaked
threshold of her pavement.

2

Am I blind alas, deaf too
that my ears lost all this?
nay, O my lover,
shameless and still radiant,
I tell you this:

I was not asleep,
I did not lie asleep on those hot rocks
while you waited.
I was not unaware when I glanced
out toward the sea
watching the purple ships.

I was not blind when I turned.
I was not indifferent when I strayed aside
or loitered as we three went
or seemed to turn a moment from the path
for that same amaranth.

I was not dull and dead when I fell
back on our couch at night.

I was not indifferent when I turned
and lay quiet.

I was not dead in my sleep.

3

Lady of all beauty,

I give you this:

say I have offered small sacrifice,

say I am unworthy your touch,

but say not:

“she turned to some cold, calm god,
silent, pitiful, in preference.”

Lady of all beauty,

I give you this:

say not:

“she deserted my altar-step,

the fire on my white hearth

was too great,

she fell back at my first glance.”

Lady, radiant and shameless,

I have brought small wreaths,

(they were a child's gift,)
I have offered myrrh-leaf,
crisp lentisk,
I have laid rose-petal
and white rock-rose from the beach.

But I give now a greater,
I give life and spirit with this.
I render a grace
no one has dared to speak,
lest men at your altar greet him
as slave, callous to your art;
I dare more than the singer
offering her lute,
the girl her stained veils,
the woman her swathes of birth,
or pencil and chalk,
mirror and unguent box.

I offer more than the lad
singing at your steps,
praise of himself,
his mirror his friend's face,
more than any girl,
I offer you this:

(grant only strength
that I withdraw not my gift,)
I give you my praise and this:
the love of my lover
for his mistress.

Telesila

*In Argos—that statue of her;
at her feet the scroll of her
love-poetry, in her hand a helmet.*

WAR is a fevered god
who takes alike
maiden and king and clod,
and yet another one,
(ah withering peril!)
deprives alike,
with equal skill,
alike indifferently,
hoar spearsman of his shaft,
wan maiden of her zone,
even he,
Love who is great War's
very over-lord.

War bent
and kissed the forehead,
yet Love swift,
planted on chin
and tenderest cyclamen lift
of fragrant mouth,

fevered and honeyed breath,
breathing o'er and o'er
those tendrils of her hair,
soft kisses
like bright flowers.

Love took
and laid the sweet,
(being extravagant,)
on lip and chin and cheek,
but ah he failed
even he,
before the luminous eyes
that dart
no suave appeal,
alas, impelling me
to brave incontinent,
grave Pallas' high command.

And yet the mouth!
ah Love ingratiate,
how was it you,
so poignant, swift and sure,
could not have taken all
and left me free,

free to desert the Argives,
let them burn,
free yet to turn
and let the city fall:
yea, let high War
take all his vengeful way,
for what am I?
I cannot save nor stay
the city's fall.

War is a fevered god,
(yet who has writ as she
the power of Love?)
War bent and kissed the forehead,
that bright brow,
ignored the chin
and the sweet mouth,
for that and the low laugh were his,
Eros ingratiate,
who sadly missed
in all the kisses count,
those eyebrows
and swart eyes,
O valiant one
who bowed

falsely and vilely trapped us,
traitorous lord.

And yet,
(remembrance mocks,)
should I have bent the maiden
to a kiss?
Ares the lover
or enchanting Love?
but had I moved
I feared
for that astute regard;
for that bright vision,
how might I have erred?
I might have marred and swept
another not so sweet
into my exile;
I might have kept a look
recalling many and many a woman's look,
not this alone,
astute, imperious, proud.

And yet
I turn and ask
again, again, again,

who march to death,
what was it worth,
reserve and pride and hurt?
what is it worth
to such as I
who turn to meet
the invincible Spartans'
massed and serried host?
what had it cost, a kiss?

Fragment Sixty-eight

. . . even in the house of Hades.

SAPPHO

I

I ENVY you your chance of death,
how I envy you this.

I am more covetous of him
even than of your glance,
I wish more from his presence
though he torture me in a grasp,
terrible, intense.

Though he clasp me in an embrace
that is set against my will
and rack me with his measure,
effortless yet full of strength,
and slay me
in that most horrible contest,
still, how I envy you your chance.

Though he pierce me – imperious –
iron – fever – dust –
though beauty is slain
when I perish,
I envy you death.

What is beauty to me?
has she not slain me enough,
have I not cried in agony of love,
birth, hate,
in pride crushed?

What is left after this?
what can death loose in me
after your embrace?
your touch,
your limbs are more terrible
to do me hurt.

What can death mar in me
that you have not?

2

What can death send me
that you have not?
you gathered violets,
you spoke:
“your hair is not less black,
nor less fragrant,
nor in your eyes is less light,
your hair is not less sweet

with purple in the lift of lock;"
why were those slight words
and the violets you gathered
of such worth?

How I envy you death;
what could death bring,
more black, more set with sparks
to slay, to affright,
than the memory of those first violets,
the chance lift of your voice,
the chance blinding frenzy
as you bent?

3

So the goddess has slain me
for your chance smile
and my scarf unfolding
as you stooped to it;
so she trapped me
with the upward sweep of your arm
as you lifted the veil,
and the swift smile and selfless.

Could I have known?
nay, spare pity,
though I break,
crushed under the goddess' hate,
though I fall beaten at last,
so high have I thrust my glance
up into her presence.

Do not pity me, spare that,
but how I envy you
your chance of death.

Lethe

NOR skin nor hide nor fleece
 Shall cover you,
Nor curtain of crimson nor fine
Shelter of cedar-wood be over you,
 Nor the fir-tree
 Nor the pine.

Nor sight of whin nor gorse
 Nor river-yew,
Nor fragrance of flowering bush,
Nor wailing of reed-bird to waken you,
 Nor of linnet,
 Nor of thrush.

Nor word nor touch nor sight
 Of lover, you
Shall long through the night but for this:
The roll of the full tide to cover you
 Without question,
 Without kiss.

Sitalkas

THOU art come at length
more beautiful
than any cool god
in a chamber under
Lycia's far coast,
than any high god
who touches us not
here in the seeded grass:
aye, than Argestes
scattering the broken leaves.

Hermonax

GODS of the sea;
Ino,
leaving warm meads
for the green, grey-green fastnesses
of the great deeps;
and Palemon,
bright seeker of sea-shaft,
hear me.

Let all whom the sea loves,
come to its altar front,
and I
who can offer no other sacrifice to thee
bring this.

Broken by great waves,
the wavelets flung it here,
this sea-gliding creature,
this strange creature like a weed,
covered with salt foam,
torn from the hillocks of rock.

I, Hermonax,
caster of nets,

risking chance,
plying the sea craft,
came on it.

Thus to sea god,
gift of sea wrack;
I, Hermonax, offer it
to thee, Ino,
and to Palemon.

Orion Dead

(Artemis speaks.)

THE cornel-trees
uplift from the furrows,
the roots at their bases,
strike lower through the barley-sprays.

So arise and face me.

I am poisoned with the rage of song.

I once pierced the flesh
of the wild deer,
now I am afraid to touch
the blue and the gold-veined hyacinths?

I will tear the full flowers
and the little heads
of the grape-hyacinths,
I will strip the life from the bulb
until the ivory layers
lie like narcissus petals
on the black earth.

Arise,
lest I bend an ash-tree

into a taut bow,
and slay – and tear
all the roots from the earth.

The cornel-wood blazes
and strikes through the barley-sprays
but I have lost heart for this.

I break a staff,
I break the tough branch.
I know no light in the woods.
I have lost pace with the wind.

Charioteer

In that manner (archaic) he finished the statue of his brother. It stands mid-way in the hall of laurels . . . between the Siphnians' offering and the famous tripod of Naxos.

ONLY the priest
of the inmost house
has such height,
only the faun
in the glade
such light, strong ankles,
only the shade of the bay-tree
such rare dark
as the darkness
caught under the fillet
that covers your brow,
only the blade
of the ash-tree
such length, such beauty
as thou,
O my brother;
and only the gods
have such love
as I bring you;

but now,
taut with love,
more than any bright lover,
I vowed
to the innermost
god of the temple,
this vow.

God of beauty, I cried,
as the four stood alert,
awaiting the shout
at the goal
to be off;
god of beauty,
I cried to that god,
if he merit the laurel,
I dedicate all of my soul
to you; to you
all my strength and my power;
if he merit the bay,
I will fashion a statue
of him, of my brother,
out of thought,
and the strength of my wrist
and the fire of my brain;

I will strive night and day
till I mould from the clay,
till I strike from the bronze,
till I conjure the rock,
the chisle, the tool,
to embody this image;
an image to startle,
to capture men's hearts,
to make all other bronze,
all art to come after,
a mock,
all beauty to follow,
a shell that is empty;
I'll stake all my soul
on that beauty,
till God shall awake
again in men's hearts,
who have said he is dead,
our King and our Lover.

Then the start,
ah the sight,
ah but dim, veiled with tears,
(so Achilles must weep
who finds his friend dead,)

will he win ?
then the ring of the steel
as two met at the goal,
entangled and foul,
misplaced at the start,
who, who blunders? not you?
what omens are set?
alas, gods of the track,
what ill wreaks its hate,
speak it clear,
let me know
what evil, what fate?
for the ring of sharp steel
told two were in peril,
two, two, one is you,
already involved
with the fears of defeat;
two grazed;
which must go?

As the wind,
Althaia's beauty came;
as one after a cruel march,
catches sight,
toward the cold dusk,
of the flower

that's her name-sake,
strayed apart
toward the road-dust,
from the stream
in the wood-depth,
so I in that darkness,
my mouth bitter
with sheer loss,
took courage,
my heart spoke,
remembering how she spoke:
"I will seek hour by hour
fresh cones, resin
and pine-flowers,
flower of pine,
laurel flower;
I will pray:
'let him come
back to us,
to our home,
with the trophy of zeal,
with the love and the proof
of the favour of god;
let him merit the bay.'
(I expect it,)

I myself on earth pray
that our father may pray;
his voice nearer the gods
must carry beyond
my mere mortal prayer:
'O my father beyond,
look down and be proud,
ask this thing
that we win,
ask it straight of the gods.' "

Was he glad,
did he know?
for the strength
of his prayer and her prayer
met me now
in one flame,
all my head, all my brow
was one flame,
taut and beaten
and faintly aglow,
as the wine-cup
encrusted and beaten and fine
with the pattern of leaves,
(so my brow,)

yet metallic and cool,
as the gold of the frigid metal
that circles the heat
of the wine.

Then the axel-tree cleft,
not ours, gods be blest;
now but three of you left,
three alert and abreast,
three – one streak of what fire?
three straight for the goal:
ah defeat,
ah despair,
still fate tricked our mares,
for they swerved,
flanks quivering and wet,
as the wind
at the mid-stretch
caught and fluttered a white scarf;
a veil shivering,
only the fluttering
of a white band,
yet unnerved and champing,
they turned,
(only knowing the swards of Achæa)

and he, O my love,
that stranger,
his stallions
stark frenzied and black,
had taken the inmost course,
overtook,
overcame,
overleapt,
and crowded you back.

O those horses
we loved and we prized;
I had gathered Alea mint
and soft branch
of the vine-stock in flower,
I had stroked Elaphia;
as one prays to a woman
"be kind,"
I had prayed Daphnaia;
I had threatened Orea
for her trick
of out-pacing the three,
even these,
I had almost despaired
at her fleet, proud pace,

O the four,
O swift mares of Achæa.

Should I pray them again?
or the gods of the track?
or Althaia at home?
or our father who died for Achæa?
or our fathers beyond
who had vanquished the east?
should I threaten or pray?

The sun struck the ridge of white marble
before me:
white sun on white marble
was black:
the day was of ash,
blind, unrepentant, despoiled,
my soul cursed the race and the track,
you had lost.

You, lost at the last?

Ah fools,
so you threatened to win?
ah fools,
so you knew my brother?

Greeks all,
all crafty and feckless,
even so, had you guessed
what ran in his veins and mine,
what blood of Achæa,
had you dared,
dared enter the contest,
dared aspire with the rest?

You had gained,
you outleapt them;
a sudden, swift lift of the reins,
a sudden, swift, taut grip of the reins,
as suddenly loosed,
you had gained.

When death comes
I will see
no vision of after,
(as some count
there may be an hereafter,)
no thought of old lover,
no girl, no woman,
neither mother,
nor yet my father

who died for Achæa,
neither God with the harp
and the sun on His brow,
but thou,
O my brother.

When death comes,
instead of a vision,
(I will catch it in bronze)
you will stand
as you stood at the end,
(as the herald announced it,
proclaiming aloud,
"Achæa has won,")
in-reining them now,
so quiet,
not turning to answer
the shout of the crowd.

The Look-out

BETTER the wind, the sea, the salt
in your eyes,
than this, this, this.

You grumble and sweat;
my ears are acute
to catch your complaint,
almost the sea's roar is less
than your constant threat
of "back and back to the shore,
and let us rest."

You grumble and curse your luck
and I hear:
"O Lynceus,
aloft by the prow,
his head on his arms,
his eyes half closed,
almost asleep,
to watch for a rock,
(and hardly ever we need
his 'to left' or 'to right')
let Lynceus have my part,
let me rest like Lynceus."

"Rest like Lynceus!"

I'd change my fate for yours,
the very least,
I'd take an oar with the rest.

"Like Lynceus,"

as if my lot were the best.

O God, if I could speak,
if I could taunt the lot
of the wretched crew,
with my fate, my work.

But I may not,
I may not tell
of the forms that pass and pass,
of that constant old, old face
that leaps from each wave
to wait underneath the boat
in the hope that at last she's lost.

Could I speak,
I would tell of great mountains
that flow, great weeds
that float and float
to tangle our oars

if I fail "to left, to right;"
where the dolphin leaps
you saw a sign from the god,
I saw why he leapt from the deep.

"To right, to left;"
it is easy enough
to lean on the prow, half asleep,
and you think,
"no work for Lynceus."
No work?

If only you'd let me take an oar,
if only my back could break with the hurt,
if the sun could blister my feet,
pain, pain that I might forget
the face that just this moment
passed through the prow
when you said, "asleep."

Many and many a sight
if I could speak,
many and many tales I'd tell,
many and many a struggle,
many a death,

many and many my hurts
and my pain so great,
I'd gladly die
if I did not love the quest.

Grumble and swear and curse,
brother, god and the boat,
and the great waves,
but could you guess
what strange terror lurks in the sea-depth,
you'd thank the gods for the ship,
the timber and giant oars, god-like,
and the god-like quest.

If you could see as I,
what lurks in the sea-depth,
you'd pray to the ropes
and the solid timbers
like god, like god;

you'd pray to the oars and your work,
you'd pray and thank
the boat for her very self;
timber and oar and plank
and sail and the sail-ropes,
these are beautiful things and great.

But Lynceus at the prow
has nothing to do but wait
till we reach a shoal or some rocks
and then he has only to lift his arms,
right, left;
O brother,
I'd change my place
for the worst seat
in the cramped bench,
for an oar, for an hour's toil,
for sweat and the solid floor.

I'd change my place
as I sit with eyes half closed,
if only I could see just the ring
cut by the boat,
if only I could see just the water,
the crest and the broken crest,
the bit of weed that rises on the crest,
the dolphin only when he leaps.

But Lynceus,
though they cannot guess
the hurt, though they do not thank

the oars for the dead peace
of heart and brain worn out,
you must wait,
alert, alert, alert.

Odyssey

M^{USE,}
*tell me of this man of wit,
who roamed long years
after he had sacked
Troy's sacred streets.*

All the rest
who had escaped death,
returned,
fleeing battle and the sea;
only Odysseus,
captive of a goddess,
desperate and home-sick,
thought but of his wife and palace;
but Calypso,
that nymph and spirit,
yearning in the furrowed rock-shelf,
burned
and sought to be his mistress;
but years passed,
the time was ripe,
the gods decreed,
(although traitors plot

to betray him in his own court,)
he was to return
to Ithaca;
and all the gods pitied him;
but Poseidon
steadfast to the last
hated
god-like Odysseus.

The sea-god visited
a distant folk,
Ethiopians,
who at the edge of earth
are divided into two parts,
(half watch the sun rise,
half, the sun set,)
there the hecatomb
of slain sheep and oxen
await his revels:
and while he rejoiced,
seated at the feast,
the rest of the gods
gathered in the palace of Olympian Zeus;
and the father of men and of gods spoke
thus :

(for he remembered bright Egisthus,
slain of Agamemnon's child,
great Orestes:)

O you spirits,
how men hate the gods,
for they say evil comes of us,
when they themselves,
by their own wickedness,
court peril
beyond their fate;
so Egisthus, defiant,
sought Agamemnon's wife
and slew Agamemnon
returning to his own palace,
though we ourselves
sent bright Hermes,
slayer of Argos,
to warn him
lest Orestes,
attaining to man's estate,
demand his inheritance
and take vengeance:
we forbade him to strike the king,
we warned him to respect his wife:

but could Hermes
of gracious aspect,
subtle with kindly speech,
thus avert the foul work?

Then the grey-eyed Athene,
the goddess, spoke:
O my father, Kronos begot,
first among the great,
his death at least was just,
so may all perish who err thus;
but my heart is rent
for the prudent Odysseus,
who, exiled from his friends,
is kept too long distressed
in an island, sea swept,
in the sea midst,
a forest island,
haunt of a spirit,
child of Atlas,
crafty of thought,
who knows the sea depth,
who supports the high pillars
which cut sky from earth;
it is his child

who keeps Odysseus
lamenting with broken heart,
ceaseless to tempt him
with soft and tender speech,
that he forget Ithaca;
but Odysseus,
yearning to see but the smoke
drift above his own house,
prefers death;
your heart, is it not touched,
O Olympian?
did not Odysseus please you
when he made sacrifice
before the Grecian ships
in great Troy?
why are you angry, Zeus?

Then Zeus,
keeper of the clouds,
answering her, spoke:
O my child,
what quaint words
have sped your lips,
for how could I forget
the god-like Odysseus,

a spirit surpassing men,
first to make sacrifice
to the deathless
in the sky-space?
but Poseidon,
girder of earth,
though yet he spares his life,
nurtures unending hate;
he goads him from place to place
because of the Cyclops
blinded of Odysseus,
Polyphemus, half-god,
greatest of the Cyclops,
whom the nymph Thoosa,
child of Phorcys,
king of the waste sea, begot
when she lay with Poseidon
among the shallow rocks:
but come,
let us plot
to reinstate Odysseus,
and Poseidon must abandon his wrath;
for what can one god accomplish,
striving alone
to defy all the deathless?

Then the grey-eyed Athene,
the goddess, spoke:
O my father, Kronos begot,
first among the great,
if then it seems just
to the highest,
that Odysseus return
to his own house,
let us swiftly send
Hermes, slayer of Argos,
your attendant,
that he state
to the fair-haired nymph,
our irrevocable wish,
that Odysseus,
valiant of heart,
be sent back:
and I will depart to Ithaca,
to incite his son,
to put courage in his heart,
that he call to the market place
the long-haired Greeks
and shut his gates
to the pretendants
who ceaselessly devour his flocks,

sheep and horned oxen
of gentle pace:
that he strive
for his father's sake
and gain favour
in men's thoughts,
I will send him to Sparta,
to Pylos' sandy waste.

*She spoke
and about her feet
clasped bright sandals,
gold-wrought, imperishable,
which lift her above sea,
across the land stretch,
wind-like,
like the wind breath.*

From the Masque

Hyacinth

I

YOUR anger charms me,
and yet all the time
I think of chaste, slight hands,
veined snow;
snow craters filled
with first wild-flowerlets;
glow of ice-gentian,
whitest violet;
snow craters
and the ice ridge
spilling light;
dawn and the lover
chaste dawn leaves bereft –
I think of these
and snow-cooled Phrygian wine.

Your anger charms me subtly
and I know
that you would take
the still hands

where I'd rest;
you would despoil
for very joy of theft;
list, lady,
I would give you one last hint:
quench your red mouth
in some cold forest lake,
cover your russet locks
with arum leaf,
quench out the colour,
still the fevered glance,
cover your want,
your fire insatiate,
I can not match your fervour,
nay, nor still my ache
with any
but white hands inviolate.

2

Take the red spoil
of grape and pomegranate,
the red camellia,
the most, most red rose;
take all the garden spills,
inveterate,

prodigal spender
just as summer goes,
the red scales of the deep in-folded spice,
the Indian, Persian and the Syrian pink,
their scent undaunted
even in that faint,
unmistakable fragrance
of the late tuberose,
(heavy its petals,
eye-lids of dark eyes
that open languorous
and more languorous close – the east,
further than scent
of our wind-smitten isle,)
take these:

O lady, take them,
prodigal
I cull and offer this and this and these
last definite whorls
of clustered peonies,
the last, the first
that stained our stainless ledge
of blue and white
and the white foam of sea,

rocks,
and that strait ledge
whiter than the rock
the Parians break
from their enchanted hill;
take, lady,
but leave me with my weed and shell
and those slight, hovering gull-wings that
recall
silver of far Hymettus' asphodel.

3

Take all
for you have taken everything,
but do not let me see you taking this;
Adonis lying spent with Venus' care,
Adonis dying were a lesser ache
than this,
to have even your slightest breath
breathe in the crystal air
where he takes breath.

Take all
for you have taken everything,
save the broad ledge of sea

which no man takes,
take all
for you have taken mirth and ease
and all the small delights
of simple poets,
the lilt of rhyme,
the sway and lift and fall,
the first spring gold
your fire has scorched to ash,
the fresh winds
that go halt
where you have passed,
the Tyrian iris
I so greatly loved,
its dark head speared
through its wet spray of leaves.

Take all,
but ah, lady, a fool, a poet
may even know when you have taken all:
up on the mountain slope
one last flower cleaves
to the wet marge of ice,
the blue of snow,
keep all your riot

in the swales below,
of grape and autumn,
take all, taking these,
for you and autumn yet
can not prevail
against that flame, that flower,
(ice, spark or jewel,)
the cyclamen,
parting its white cyclamen leaves.

4

O, I am ill with dust
as you with stain,
O, I am worthless,
weary, world-bedragged,
nevertheless to mountains
still the rain
falls on the tangle
of dead under-brush,
freshens the loam,
the earth and broken leaves
for that hoar-frost
of later star or flower,

the fragile host
of Greek anemones.

Say I am little meet
to call the youth,
say I have little magic
to enchant,
but is that reason
why your flaring will
should sweep and scorch,
should lap and seethe and fill
with last red flame
the tender ditch and runnel
which the spring freshet
soon must fill again?

White violets
have no place
on your⁷₈ hot brow;
how can I bring you
what the spring must bring?
what can I offer?
lush and heady mallow?
the fire-grass
or the serpent-spotted

fire-flower?
O take them,
for I stand a ruinous cloud
between you
and the chaste uplifted hill.

O take them swiftly
and more swiftly go,
for spring is distant yet,
for spring is far;
you have your tense, short space
of blazing sun,
your melons, vines,
your terraces of fruit;
now all you have,
all, all I gladly give
who long but for the ridge,
the crest and hollow,
the lift and fall,
the reach and distant ledge
of the sun-smitten,
wind-indented snow.

The bird-choros of

Ion

BIRDS from Parnassus,
swift

you dart
from the loftiest peaks;
you hover, dip,
you sway and perch
undaunted on the gold-set cornice;
you eagle,
god's majestic legate,
who tear, who strike
song-birds in mid-flight,
my arrow whistles toward you,
swift
be off;

ah drift,
ah drift
so soft, so light,
your scarlet foot so deftly placed
to waft you neatly
to the pavement,
swan, swan

and do you really think
your song
that tunes the harp of Helios,
will save you
from the arrow-flight?
turn back,
back
to the lake of Delos;

lest all the song notes
pause and break
across a blood-stained throat
gone songless,
turn back,
back
ere it be too late,
to wave-swept Delos.

Alas, and still another,
what ?
you'd place your mean nest
in the cornice?
sing, sing
my arrow-string,
tell to the thief

that plaits its house
for fledglings
in the god's own house,
that still the Alpheus
whispers sweet
to lure
the birdlets to the place,
that still the Isthmus
shines with forests;
on the white statues
must be found
no straw nor litter
of bird-down,
Phœbos must have his portal fair;

and yet, O birds,
though this my labour
is set,
though this my task is clear,
though I must slay you,
I, god's servant,
I who take here
my bread and life
and sweep the temple,
still I swear

that I would save you,
birds or spirits,
winged songs
that tell to men god's will;

still, still
the Alpheus whispers clear
to lure the bird-folk
to its waters,
ah still
the Isthmus
blossoms fair;
lest all the song notes
pause and break
across a blood-stained throat
gone songless,
turn back,
back
ere it be too late,
to wave-swept Delos.

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